

Facilitating and Participating in Consensus

Consensus is...

- A decision making structure dependent on the perspective and listening skills of every participant in a group
- A process by which decisions are reached that reflect the majority opinion of a group but can be influenced (or improved upon) by the minority opinion
- An opportunity for leadership to emerge from anyone within a group
- 100% commitment to move forward in the collective best interest of the group

Consensus isn't...

- 100% agreement
- A zero-sum game: it's not about winners and losers
- Endless discussion
- Voting

Key Ingredients for Working in Consensus

- Group self-knowledge and self-awareness: deciding in the collective best interest of the group depends on all participants understanding the group, its values and priorities
- Equal access to information: everyone needs all the info
- Listeners and problem solvers
- Trust and willingness to put the group first: team-building is key
- Shared criteria for decision-making
- Time

Ways to Build Consensus as a Participant

- Avoid arguing for your own priorities
- Avoid votes
- Propose solutions: look for compromises and alternatives
- Involve everyone in the decision process – differences of opinion can lead to better decisions
- The moment of truth: Are there any objections to...

Ways for Participants to Express Objections in Consensus

- Standing Aside: "I don't support this but I won't stop the group from moving forward."
- Reservations: "I have concerns, here's what needs to change so I can get on board..."
- Blocking: "I cannot support this or allow the group to support it – it is immoral or would have negative consequences for our group or our community."

Responsibilities of the Facilitator in a Consensus Decision-making Process

- Facilitate discussions to surface the collective interests of the group, ensuring all voices are heard
- Move the meeting forward, advancing or ending discussions that may be circular or hindering forward progress
- Push for a decision in the interest of the group and change topics once consensus is reached
- Act in the best interest of the group, avoiding advocating for a particular outcome based on personal preference
- Refrain from barring a consensus decision reached by the group
- In the event that the consensus process fails to yield results, facilitator may identify an alternate decision-making structure